

Charles V. and the Reformation.

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tradition and law behind it. Luther himself and all the reformers were to act on this assumption when on the track of those dissenters who could not see eye to eye with them in matters of doctrine. Charles had indeed some sympathy with reform. He was the champion of that reforming policy which had many exponents within the Church, especially among Spanish churchmen. Reform was, too, for him a capital political device. He could on occasion frighten the pope with its spectre, and he did not hesitate to make use of it to further his designs, especially when his holiness happened to be his political enemy. He did desire, nevertheless, to ameliorate the Church. His panacea was a General Council, with, if need be, even without, the co-operation of the pope. But his reform policy did not extend to the doctrine or constitution of the Church. A disruption of the Church did not accord with his ideas of political and ecclesiastical unity. National or territorial churches were incompatible not only with the supremacy of the pope but with that of the emperor, the supremacy of each being indispensable to the other. He was, on this ground alone, hostile to Luther from the beginning, and he continued hostile to the end. "This man will never make a heretic of me," he burst out after listening to his plea at Worms. Thirty-five years later, in his seclusion at San Juste, he regretted that he had not ignored the imperial safe-conduct, and treated the heretic Luther as Sigismund had treated the heretic Hus. He persecuted his adherents wherever he had a free hand, as in the Netherlands, and the cruelty of the persecution is a dark blot on what is, on the whole, a rather unsympathetic character. He was and remained a bigoted Catholic as far as a statesman who was involved in the political whirlpool of an age of conflict for fully a third of a century could allow himself to be a bigot.

Fortunately for the Reformation in Germany, Charles could not afford to play the bigot, and Luther could afford to play the rebel. Luther was the champion of a national as well as a religious movement. It was too popular to be quashed by the surreptitious edict of the partisan majority of the Diet of Worms. Charles might have defied popular sentiment, though it would have been dangerous to do so, but Luther had a number of the princes as well as the people on